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Building Firm Foundations

Review of the Primary Program in British Columbia
Interim Report I

Province of British Columbia

Ministry of Education and
Ministry Responsible for
Multiculturalism and Human Rights

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and Human Rights

Research and Evaluation Branch

Fall 1992

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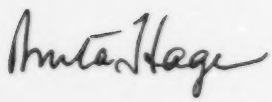
A MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER

Reflecting on the first official year of the Primary Program, I am very pleased to present this evidence of the firm grounding on which the Program is structured. This report is the first of several interim reports based on the review activities outlined in the *Framework for Primary Program Review*.

Much like the Primary Program itself, the Framework is designed to ensure the highest quality education for the children of British Columbia. Both the Program and the review are the result of effective collaboration. Both draw inspiration from the finest of current practice and research in education. Both involve examining existing practices, critically seeking better alternatives, and working hard to assess improvements in the context of what they mean for our children in our schools.

I feel certain that the information presented here will continue to build confidence in the Primary Program. As we move toward full implementation by the end of the decade, continuous review will provide us with valuable information that can assist us with ongoing improvement of the Program. Ultimately, it is our children who will benefit.



Anita Hagen
Minister of Education and
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NOTE TO THE READER

This report makes reference to the following documents:

Primary Program Foundation Document

Primary Program Resource Document

Year 2000: A Framework for Learning

Framework for Primary Program Review

Annual Report, 1990 to 1991, Ministry of Education

Design reviews by seven outside reviewers.

For information on obtaining any or all of these materials, please contact:

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BACKGROUND: PRIMARY PROGRAM REVIEW

The Review Process

As the Primary Program is implemented in British Columbia schools, every aspect of it will be thoroughly and continually reviewed. Interim reports on review findings will be published annually, and a comprehensive report is planned for mid-decade. These reports will assist in ongoing Program development and inform the public about the Program and its effects.

The review process, and the collaborative manner in which it was developed, are described in *Framework for Primary Program Review* (1991). That document also describes the outstanding features of the review process. These features are summarized below.

I wholeheartedly agree with the Ministry's standards for its review process and only wish that such a professional standard were more widely prevalent in the United States.

- Bredekamp, p 2

The review is to be guided by four principles:

- **Utility**: seek information that can be used to improve the program.
- **Feasibility**: make scope, timing, and costs appropriate.
- **Propriety**: ensure confidentiality, objectivity, and fairness.
- **Accuracy**: use data that are credible, applicable, and trustworthy.

The review process is co-ordinated and managed by the Ministry's Research and Evaluation Branch, assisted by three advisory groups:

- The Primary Program Review Consulting Group, which offers advice on specific technical matters related to review and reporting.
- The Provincial Program Evaluation Advisory Committee, which monitors the direction and progress of the review.
- The Education Advisory Council, which considers review findings in light of educational policy.

Each year, for a period of five years starting with 1991/1992, the reviews will cover different issues from among the following categories:

- **Design**: the nature, relevance, and usability of the Primary Program as represented by the *Foundation* and *Resource* documents.
- **Implementation**: the processes through which the Program is initiated, interpreted, and supported; the nature of the Program as it develops in practice.
- **Effects on students**: the nature of students' experiences and development, and of system accessibility.
- **Effects on the education system**: its accountability and the nature and impact of changing roles and responsibilities among educators, parents, and learners.
- **Perceptions**: attitudes and beliefs that learners, parents, educators, and the public hold regarding the nature, implementation, and effects of the Program.

Timelines for the review of specific issues are described in *Framework for Primary Program Review*.

The First Review: Program Design

The present review examines issues of Primary Program design. Later reviews will evaluate the Program under the other categories of implementation, effects, and perceptions.

As explained in *Framework for Primary Program Review*, p 11, three broad issues of design have been identified for consideration at this stage:

- To what extent is the Program congruent with the *Year 2000: A Framework for Learning*?
- To what extent do the Program philosophy, rationale, goals, and position statements reflect and represent current knowledge about the education of young children?
- To what extent are the *Foundation* and *Resource* documents practical and usable for B.C. educators?

The first review step was to gather outside opinions. The Ministry commissioned a number of independent specialists to review the

Primary Program Foundation Document (in one case both the *Foundation* and *Resource* documents). Each reviewer was asked one of the above questions.

The outside reviewers were chosen, as observers with stature and credibility in the field of education, to provide impartial opinions of the Primary Program. Individuals who had been involved in the development of the Program were excluded. All seven outside reviewers are or have been members of university faculties: six in education faculties and one in an English faculty. Two are from British Columbia, two from eastern Canada, two from the United States, and one from Australia. As expected and desired, the responses exhibited a variety of viewpoints.

The next step was to analyse and synthesize the outside reviewers' responses to the questions. This task was given to the Primary Program Review Consulting Group, whose members compared and contrasted the observations and comments of the outside reviewers, and grouped them for systematic presentation in this report.

What This Report Covers

For convenience, the report refers to the three design issues with single words:

- "To what extent is the Program congruent with the *Year 2000: A Framework for Learning*?" is termed **Congruence**. The reviewers of Congruence are Michael Manley-Casimir and Gordon Wells.
- "To what extent do the Program philosophy, rationale, goals, and position statements reflect and represent current knowledge about the education of young children?" is termed **Philosophy**. The reviewers of Philosophy are Sue Bredekamp, Brian Cambourne, David Elkind, and Judith M. Newman.
- "To what extent are the *Foundation* and *Resource* documents practical and usable for B.C. educators?" is termed **Usability**. The reviewer of Usability is Richard M. Coe.

As will be seen in the discussion, the second of these issues, Philosophy, generated the widest range of commentary and the deepest insights into the design implications of the Primary

Program. The contents of the Philosophy reviews are therefore dealt with first and occupy the bulk of this report.

Two background sections precede the Philosophy discussion. One describes the need for educational change. The other explains the changed concept of the learning process which flows through the comments of the Philosophy reviewers. Then the Philosophy discussion describes those aspects of the Primary Program the reviewers single out for acknowledgement and appreciation. Finally, it identifies areas to concentrate on in improving the Program.

After the discussion of Philosophy, two brief sections consider the reviews of Congruence and Usability. Some comments made by the reviewers of Congruence seemed to shed light on Philosophy, and these were taken into appropriate account.

The report is rounded out with a summary and some biographical details on the seven outside reviewers.

BACKGROUND: CHALLENGES FOR CHANGE

In 1991/92 the Primary Program was launched in British Columbia schools, introducing a different approach to education.

This change represents a collaborative response by parents, educators, concerned organizations, and government in British Columbia to three sets of challenges:

- **Changes in society and the world.** Family life is changing, leading to smaller families, more single-parent families, and more women in employment. There is increasing awareness of the responsibilities of society towards its own diversity and of the need to nurture the growth and protect the rights of cultural, racial, and linguistic minorities and persons with disabilities. New technologies and changes in international trade are forcing economic restructuring, while workplaces are becoming more diversified and individualized, all raising the required levels of education and training. These developments, which affect everyone, make unprecedented demands on education.
- **Dissatisfaction with the existing education system**. As reported in the 1990/91 annual report of the Ministry of Education, about 66 percent of Grade 8 students who were enrolled in 1986/87 graduated in 1991. Thirty-four percent left school before graduation. At present it is unclear how many of the 34 percent actually left the school system permanently. Included in that 34 percent were students who transferred out of Province, as well as those who withdrew and later returned to school. Currently, the Ministry is refining its data collection system in order to determine a more accurate school completion rate. Still, these figures indicate that changes in the school system are needed to encourage more students to graduate.

  In addition, the school system must equip students with the skills required for employment in today's changing world. It

must encourage more graduates to take further education, and it must foster lifelong learning. Education, it is increasingly believed, should place more emphasis on promoting learning among individuals and less on making comparisons among them.

- **Better understanding of the learning process.** Educational research in the last three decades has brought a deeper appreciation of the subtlety and complexity of learning, which is seen now as a lifelong process. Traditional methods of schooling, in which teachers convey explicit bodies of information to fill recipient minds, are increasingly thought to be out of step with the way people naturally learn things in the rest of their lives. For individuals seen as lifelong learners in a succession of contexts, the years spent in school have too often seemed among the least productive. There is increasing acceptance that people vary greatly in how they learn, that they usually learn more easily from concrete situations and social interactions than from abstract individual exercises, and that what is actually learned may differ widely from what is formally taught. Accordingly, the emerging approach to education regards learners as actively making sense of new situations, knowledge as the combination of information with the ability to use it, and teachers as helping and encouraging the learners to find their individual paths.

This set of challenges has motivated and shaped the educational changes in British Columbia which find their first expression in the Primary Program.

The Primary Program is replacing the former programs known as Kindergarten and Grades 1 to 3. The visible elimination of the Grades, a form of organization typical of education in British Columbia and across North America for more than a century, is really only a sign and by-product of many deeper changes in goals, concepts, and design described in *Year 2000: A Framework for Learning*. Building on the experience gained in the Primary Program, similar changes are under development in two other programs. The proposed Intermediate Program will encompass Grades 4 to 10, and the proposed Graduation Program will encompass Grades 11 and 12. But it is in the Primary Program that the principles and themes common to all three Programs and set forth in the *Year 2000 Framework* are translated into practice and first come to light for consideration and review.

BACKGROUND: HOW LEARNING OCCURS

The Philosophy of the Primary Program builds on a change in understanding of how learning takes place. This change has emerged over the last thirty years from the experiences of educators and from advances in educational theory.

The reviewers' comments on the Primary Program's Philosophy are clearly shaped by and support this changed view of the learning process. The reader needs to see what the reviewers mean by "learning" not only to understand their review comments but also - as those comments disclose - to understand fully the Philosophy of the Primary Program. Therefore, it seems appropriate to begin by reconstructing from the comments of the Philosophy reviewers how learning is now understood to occur.

We can no longer hold as axiomatic the belief that whatever is learned must have been taught or the belief that students learn only what their teachers teach. We have to understand learning and teaching as distinct ventures - learning: constructing out of our individual experiences some sense of how the world works; teaching: intentionally helping to extend another's knowledge or skill. Sometimes these two activities connect; frequently, however, they don't.

- Newman, p 3

This changed concept of learning can be seen from many angles:

- **Knowledge implies meaning and use**. To show that a student has acquired knowledge, it is no longer sufficient to demonstrate that a body of information has been successfully transmitted by the teacher. Knowledge is not just information received, available, and repeatable on request; knowledge is now seen as meaningful, usable information that has become part of the student's repertoire of capabilities. Information transmission thus ceases to be the only goal. Emphasis shifts to developing understanding and using relevant and meaningful knowledge to promote further learning.
- **Learning is active, not passive**. Learning is seen as the creation of a structure of meaning and a set of strategies by a learner seeking to make sense of his or her situation. Learning is therefore something the learner must actively do. A learner does not simply open the mind to receive what a teacher supplies. Learning occurs when learners select from within their environment what they need to know, understand, think about, or gain control over. To stimulate learning of this kind, the teacher provides an environment rich in sources of

experience the learner can grasp, helps the learner see the progress being made, continually urges further improvement, new goals, and higher standards, and offers support in the form of encouragement, feedback, and suggestions.

- **Learning is many-sided and spontaneous**. Traditionally, learning, however embellished by creative teachers, in principle required a step-by-step progress, usually all students proceeding together through a predetermined curriculum. In the changed approach each child is given opportunities to develop what have been called multiple intelligences: "language, logical-mathematical analysis, spatial representation, musical thinking, the use of the body to solve problems and make things, an understanding of other individuals, and an understanding of ourselves" (Howard Gardner, cited in Cambourne, p 12). Learning involves the development of all these capabilities interactively, and often happens spontaneously and unexpectedly.

The philosophy of the Primary Program as articulated in the Guiding Principles is highly congruent with ... current thinking about appropriate education for young children.

- Bredekamp, p 3

- **Learning is both social and individual**. Interactions among learners are as important in the learning process as learner-teacher interactions. A learner learns not only many things but also in many different ways from all those around. Education can become more effective by acknowledging and responding to social opportunities and incentives for learning. At the same time, learners are not alike. They learn at different speeds in different ways at different times. These individual differences mean that comparisons drawn between learners have little educational meaning or value for learners themselves.

*This [*Primary Program Foundation Document*] is truly an extraordinary document! It is the most comprehensive and detailed statement of elementary developmental education that I have ever seen. It is also very up-to-date and embodies the very latest findings regarding the teaching of language, science, and math ... It is in the spirit of respect for a truly groundbreaking document in education that I offer my remarks.*

- Elkind, p 1

- **Learning is lifelong**. The learning that happens in school is only a small part of one's lifetime learning, and only part of the learning that happens even during one's school years. Thus an important function of the education system, apart from enhancing learning within the classroom and the school, is more deeply to increase one's abilities to learn elsewhere as well, in the places and situations where the majority of one's subsequent lifetime learning really occurs: outside the classroom, in adulthood, and on the job. Learning skills, for example, are increasingly important in modern society. It is by focusing on learning - how it is done, how to help people do it better - that schools can make their greatest potential long-term contribution to their students and, through them, to society.

The reviewers of the Philosophy of the Primary Program support this view of the learning process.

PHILOSOPHY: COMMENDING THE PROGRAM

The reviewers commend a number of aspects of the Philosophy of the Primary Program as innovative in being consistent with current thinking about learner-focused education. Their commendations cluster in three areas of the Philosophy: its commitment to promoting the natural and intuitive learning capabilities of children, its principles and methods of assessment and evaluation, and its support for flexible organization of learners.

Promotion of Natural and Intuitive Learning Capabilities

Researchers have come to recognize "the enormous power of ... 'natural' or 'intuitive' learning" (Cambourne, p 8) which flourishes in pre-school children but withers as they grow. Learner-focused education seeks to nurture, expand, and prolong this natural capability in a school setting.

I recommend it as compulsory reading for all who profess expertise in early childhood education and curriculum development ... Here is dramatic proof that powerful, consistent theory can be generated and refined by practitioners.

- Cambourne, p 1

This natural and intuitive kind of learning works differently from conventional notions of learning. The learner, instead of onloading knowledge like cargo, weaves a pattern of meaning: "Knowledge is perceived as a network of relationships, with neither foundations nor hierarchies ... [Thus learning] involves finding and understanding the patterns which connect ... rather than building up a hierarchy of [bits of information]" (Cambourne, p 9). Continuity through time and across the learner's world is therefore vital. The learner must "continually update his/her evolving model of the world and how it works, so that the misconceptions and the 'naive understandings' can be constantly confronted and modified" (Cambourne, p 8).

The obvious way to achieve this comprehensiveness and continuity is to have learning "simulate the contexts and processes that characterize learning in the world outside the classroom"

(Cambourne, p 8). The reviewers applaud the Primary Program's design as a highly successful "simulation" of this kind, citing and emphasizing characteristics such as the following:

- The broadening and multiplying of educational goals: the "five goal areas [and] ... the expanded goal statements ... mirror the seven intelligences which Gardner describes" (Cambourne, p 12).
- The emphasis throughout on the active involvement of the learner in setting tasks.
- The use of social interaction as a form of learning: "the role of other people in helping focus a learner's perceptions" (Newman, p 7). Moreover, the use of "fluid rather than static groups" to organize their interactions (Cambourne, p 9).
- Play as a valued form of learning "emphasized by professionals but unfortunately still widely misunderstood by the general public" (Bredekamp, p 3). Play, moreover, as something that can diffuse through and enliven all forms of expression.
- The emphasis on the development of language as part of a larger and more complex system of representation and communication which includes such other modes as dance, dramatics, drawing, construction, gestures, and symbolic signs.

In these and other ways, the reviewers suggest, the Primary Program seeks to replicate the originating conditions of a child's enormous early learning power, so that it may be encouraged to continue to flourish.

Assessment and Evaluation

The reviewers pay much attention to the Primary Program's approach to assessment and evaluation. They do so for two reasons. The first is that assessment and evaluation methods are always important in shaping education. In traditional education, testing and reporting priorities often were decisive influences on what was taught and how. Under pressure for external accountability, educators would find themselves "teaching to the test." As Wells remarks, there is "truth in the old adage about assessment being the tail that wags the instructional dog" (p 9). Changes in educational approach will not go far without corresponding changes in assessment and evaluation methods.

The approach to assessment and evaluation ... is rigorous and valid, acknowledges the professionalism of teachers, reduces the opportunities for the curriculum to be controlled by the testing and publishing industries (as it has in the USA), is inclusive rather than exclusive of the major stakeholders in the child's education, and is congruent with the philosophy and rationale which underpins the educational vision contained in the document.

- Cambourne, p 12

More important to the reviewers, however, is the fact that in the Primary Program assessment and evaluation have a new and even more central role to play, a role they praise as exemplifying learner-focused principles.

In the Primary Program assessment and evaluation are designed to support learning and move it forward. Assessment and evaluation inform instruction by focusing on each learner. Both teacher and learner are involved in monitoring the child's progress over time. As Newman says approvingly of the Primary Program, "the fundamental purpose for assessing and evaluating is to support and enhance the child's ongoing learning" (p 6). The simplified forms of traditional, report-driven assessment thus give way to something more thorough and complex. Unlike the periodic hurdles of class tests, the Primary Program's assessment and evaluation operate continually, challenging every learner (however accomplished) always to do better. Assessment and evaluation foster risk-taking and initiative by encouraging all learners to strive towards their individual best and to make personal improvement a motivation for continuous learning.

In the Primary Program external accountability becomes more than simply another duty of the teacher. Reporting becomes a communication system among teacher, child, school personnel, and parents with information flowing in all directions through a variety of formal and informal reporting strategies. In Newman's description of the Primary Program again: "periodic reporting, both formal and informal ... is intended to describe the children's learning so that children, parents and other school personnel are able to perceive the learning that is happening" (p 6). The discussions with parents and school personnel often contribute to and promote deeper understanding of assessment and evaluation and help ensure that the learner's accomplishments, needs, and self-understanding are more fully identified and accurately communicated among all concerned.

The approach to assessment and evaluation described in the Document represents a decisive break from traditional measurement based approaches to evaluating children's learning.

- Cambourne, p 12

The reviewers welcome the Primary Program's endorsement of the gathering of authentic evidence as the basis for assessment, evaluation and reporting. The learner is observed, not in the controlled environment of a formal test, but in everyday situations, carrying on authentic tasks, that is, performances or assignments meaningful to and sometimes chosen by the learner.

In my view the authors [of the Principles and Goals] have succeeded in reflecting the central insights offered by thirty years of research.

- Newman, p 6

Often these tasks will be undertaken by a group, so that a significant portion of the task from the child's point of view is interactive and co-operative. The materials and items used thus make learner-focused assessment "very different from formal assessment where most items usually have nothing at all to do with classroom learning experiences" (Elkind, p 6).

The teacher in making the assessment is expected to use the insight of a participant and the full power of human understanding based on familiarity with the learner. The teacher's intuition is needed to collect, describe, interpret, and consider the ongoing multiple sources of evidence relevant to comprehending the child's many-sided learning in all goal areas. As Cambourne says, "the knowledgeable and experienced 'human-as-instrument' is more effective, accurate, credible and trustworthy than the traditional 'test-as-instrument,' especially when making sense of human behaviour" (p 13).

An important comment by Bredekamp points out a possible area of misunderstanding. While agreeing with the Primary Program's rejection of standardized tests except for diagnostic purposes, she cautions that *standardization* itself is not the problem and in assessment should probably be extended: "As more work is done on authentic assessment techniques ... it is likely that more standardization may and should result. The virtues of standardization (systematic data collection, reliability, objectivity) do not need to be sacrificed and should not be neglected with the use of more authentic assessments such as teacher observation and portfolio review. Again, we do not want to 'throw the baby out with the bath'" (Bredekamp, p 6). The Primary Program's distinction between assessment and evaluation helps to clarify her point: the problem to be properly avoided is standardization in *evaluation* (interpretation and decision-making), whereas standardization can be very helpful in *assessment* (collecting evidence). It can be especially helpful, for example, in revealing areas where children are not succeeding, areas where they need more attention.

The problem arises not with systematic methods as such but rather with allowing such methods to displace comprehensive interpretation and decision-making. Bredekamp is saying that where traditional testing methods fail is that they allow *evaluation* to become systematic and thus constrain interpretation and

decision-making. The evaluative component of the assessment and evaluation cycle is what should not be standardized. This important point also underscores the value of the Primary Program's distinction between assessment and evaluation.

Overall, the Philosophy reviewers support and applaud the Primary Program's approach to assessment and evaluation: "The principles are completely congruent with [the National Association for the Education of Young Children's] guidelines for appropriate assessment as well as the standards of the American Psychological Association" (Bredekamp, p 8). The *Foundation Document* "more than reflects recent research and thinking into the nature and purpose of assessment and evaluation. It is in my opinion at the cutting edge" (Cambourne, p 12). "The whole section on assessment and evaluation is very well thought out" (Wells, p 9).

Flexible Organization of Learners

Among the most visible features of the Primary Program are the organizational changes implied in the notion of continuous learning.

[The emphasis on "learning from others" reflects] new research on the importance of social construction of knowledge and the role of social interaction in problem-solving. This is a theme throughout the Primary Program document that reflects current thinking very well.

- Bredekamp, p 7

This concept results in two changes in organization: eliminating retention (failure) and promotion altogether, and eliminating the system of Grades and Grade classes. Bredekamp (p 4) comments that the elimination of retention and promotion "is the right thing to do based on clear evidence from research" and that in taking this step "the Primary Program ... has set a standard for educational bureaucracies throughout the world." She praises the Program's elimination of Grades for allowing "different schools and different teachers to achieve the goal of non-graded organization without adhering to one formula" (p 4).

An associated change is the flexibility in grouping children for instruction in short-term, fluid groups. The long-term, homogeneous groups of traditional schooling are rightly rejected by the Program, according to the reviewers. Cambourne names the Position Statements on Continuous Progress and Non-graded Organization as removing "features of traditional classrooms which made it almost impossible for natural learning to be implemented in the past" (p 8).

As Bredekamp suggests (p 6), these organizational changes raise questions about how students in future will make the transition from the Primary to the Intermediate Program and the extent to which the boundaries between the two can be blurred or erased.

PHILOSOPHY: IMPROVING THE PROGRAM

The reviewers indicate several directions in which the Primary Program may in future need to be strengthened. These turn out to be prominent directions of current educational research. In fact, according to the Philosophy reviewers, it is a tribute to the Program's sophistication that its further development will not be so much to correct deficiencies as to keep up with the advancing frontier of educational understanding and knowledge. One reviewer remarks that even the weaknesses of the document are useful because they accurately indicate where further research is needed. Directions of future Program development include improvements in addressing the individuality of and differences among learners, further development of concepts of curriculum, and improved support for the changing role of the teacher.

[The Foundation Document] is extraordinarily ambitious and sets very high goals and standards. In many sections it comes very close to providing the kind of guidance that teachers and administrators need to attain these goals. Nonetheless, not all of the sections are of the same high quality ... Indeed one of the real fringe benefits of the weaknesses of this document is that they highlight where research is badly needed.

- Elkind, p 14

Learners as Individuals

The reviewers in different ways draw out a theme that runs through the Primary Program "like a leitmotif" (Cambourne, p 11). This theme is the uniqueness and individuality of learners, the belief that the differences between them should be respected, catered to, and encouraged to develop. This appreciation of learning as a highly individual matter corresponds to trends in current educational thinking: "Recent research has begun to flesh out the extent to which students possess different kinds of minds and therefore learn to remember, perform, know, think, and understand in different ways" (Cambourne, p 11).

The reviewers favour this emphasis and commend the learner-focused strategies through which the Primary Program seeks to address and enhance individuality. For example, the reviewers agree with the rejection of comparisons between children, prescriptive curricula, ranking according to averages, the traditional focus on expectations and deficiencies, organization

by Grades, and the promotion/retention practices associated with such an organization. They approve of continuous learning, of learner-chosen goals and activity areas, of self-assigned tasks and assessments, of diversity in individual programs and ways of understanding. Indeed, in many cases they would recommend going further.

Some reviewers indicate ways in which the Primary Program could do more than it does to encourage individuality. For example, Elkind says that "much of the document seems to presuppose an ideal child and an ideal teacher ... [rather than] real children and teachers with their varied abilities, skills, knowledge, talents, and personalities" (p 2). He argues that the Primary Program should move further to address individual differences, especially in the areas of movement activities (p 7), social understanding (p 12), and mathematical aptitude (p 12).

Overall, the writers are to be commended for bringing together an enormous amount of research and theory into a comprehensive program.

- Elkind, p 14

Cultural and other differences among children could also be more fully recognized and taken advantage of by the Primary Program according to Bredekamp (p 6) and Elkind (p 5). The Program appears to emphasize cultural similarities among children, implying a "colour-blind" approach by teachers. By contrast these reviewers believe that differences among children are very apparent to the children themselves and are inseparable from their identities. Instead of being ignored or suppressed in the classroom, these differences ought to be explicitly valued. The theme, they imply, could be subtly changed from "underneath our differences we're all very much alike" to "the differences between us are valuable and good, and by nurturing them we learn about ourselves."

Further Development of the Curriculum

Refinements

All the reviewers who comment on the curriculum section of the *Foundation Document* point to ambiguities and inconsistencies among the descriptors. Bredekamp, noting an unevenness in detail, remarks that the descriptors are not perfect but that she knows how difficult they are to develop (p 8). Elkind wishes the descriptors could be filled in with many more concrete examples to clarify their meaning. Remarking that "the treatment of the various curricular

domains is rather uneven," he hastens to add that this reflects the current state of knowledge (p 1). The different parts of the curriculum section, says Newman, appear as if they "were written by different groups of people who did not engage in much collaboration" (p 9). Wells, though noting that the curriculum section is "very thorough," remarks that the descriptors exhibit "a lack of proportion" and that the way they are couched "has led to some rather arbitrary assignments in places" (p 10). Moreover, difficulties over curriculum, more than anything else, concern Manley-Casimir. In the opinion of the reviewers, refinement of curriculum and rethinking of its role should continue to be a high priority. The critical findings of these reviewers will assist the Ministry in its ongoing efforts to strengthen and improve the Primary Program.

The treatment of some domains is quite thorough while the treatment of others tends to be a little more superficial. This does not reflect on the writers so much as it does on the state of our knowledge. We have much more data on some areas of schooling than on others.

- Elkind, p 1

The curriculum and stages of learning

In their comments on the curriculum section of the *Foundation Document*, the reviewers differ about one aspect of how learning occurs. The difference becomes apparent in their opinions about whether, and to what extent, the curriculum should reflect expectations of development. This question has two parts: does the learning of a particular child progress through identifiable stages, and are those stages roughly associated with certain ages? How this question comes to be answered will influence the direction of further curriculum development in the Primary Program.

Differences among reviewers

As Newman points out, "Having moved away from a transmission paradigm we are now challenged with the awesome task of finding new ways of establishing curriculum guidelines for teachers." The reviewers' reaction to the curriculum section of the Foundation Document varied both in terms of responses to the curriculum and in suggestions for improvement. Most of the reviewers accepted the concept of learning stages that appears in the descriptors of the curriculum section and offered suggestions for improvement and refinement. Some criticized the learning stages as linear, pointing out that they reflected the transmission model which unduly emphasizes the teacher's role as dispenser of information rather than the student's role as learner.

It is only by facing the contradictions between our beliefs and practices that we grow as educators.

- Newman, p 11

Elkind

According to Elkind, at many places in the curriculum section (and elsewhere) the descriptors and other statements do not accurately represent the capabilities developed at those points in the successive learning stages of child development (pp 4, 5, 8, 9-13). He leaves no doubt that he regards the learning stages themselves as established and accepted (p 3).

Bredekamp

Bredekamp points out that the organization she represents (the National Association for the Education of Young Children) employs the concept of "developmentally appropriate," which means not only "individually appropriate" but also "age appropriate" (p 3). Though she recognizes that there is a "problem" with rigidly adhering to Piaget's view of the stages of children's thinking, she would "include the stages...to help teachers understand the typical thinking of most children within the Primary Program, including the transition from preoperational to concrete operational thought and its implications for certain types of instruction, such as children's ability to perform mental operations when problems have concrete referents" (p 7).

Turning to the curriculum, Bredekamp states that the descriptors "serve a very valuable function" and that the curriculum section overall is "very well done, current, and useful" (pp 8-9). Teaching, she says, must be directed to "areas where children are not succeeding as well as their strengths." Thus she welcomes the implicit benchmarks indicated by the curriculum descriptors as "very legitimate and research based. The parameters are broad enough that they allow for great individual variation but would also identify situations where children are really in trouble or really advanced" (p 8).

Wells

Although Wells's review focused on the congruence issue, his comments on the curriculum and other matters indicate that he believes in the validity and utility of learning stages, though he would modify them for different cultural situations (p 7). The descriptors, he says, "provide an excellent statement of expectations for children's development in each area and thus represent a guide to teachers for the formulation of more detailed goals of learning and teaching" (p 10). Yet, unlike some

The aim is not to force all children into the same preformulated mould, but to encourage the development of self-determining learners who make their own sense of the world with the aid of the cultural resources ... that the 'thoughtful, informed' teacher makes available.

- Wells, p 6

other reviewers, he sees the curriculum section as "following well" from the preceding sections.

Newman

In contrast, Newman dismisses the curriculum section as inconsistent with the Primary Program. To emphasize her rejection of it she structures her review around a distinction between an "ideal" curriculum (the goals and principles of the Primary Program, which she accepts) and a "formal" curriculum (the curriculum section, which she rejects). Where Bredekamp and Elkind see wrinkles which can be smoothed away, Newman believes the situation cannot be corrected by refining or re-fashioning the present curriculum because the approach it takes is inherently opposed to the goals and principles of the Primary Program. She believes this can lead only to frustration in practice: "It isn't adequate to signal a paradigm shift in the Rationale section of a guidelines and then to offer detailed scope and sequence charts outlining the "what" of a curriculum" (p 7).

How this learning paradigm gets translated into specific curricular guidelines is problematic not only for you but for the rest of us struggling to present a different instructional perspective.

- Newman, p 11

The curriculum section is opposed to the Primary Program in two ways:

- First, she says, this section is still a "traditional transmission document" which *tells* the teacher *what* to teach. By contrast, within a learner-focused model like the Primary Program where meaning is something actively constructed by the learner, an appropriate curriculum would *show* the teacher by stories and examples *how* to teach different children in different situations. The contents of a curriculum in the learner-focused context should be not transmitted but "enacted" (p 9).
- Second, she says, the curriculum assumes that learning occurs in prescribed stages as delineated by the descriptors. There is much recent research, she says, contesting the idea that children go through the same sequence of stages when learning. Moreover, to assume that they do so is to reintroduce the notion of an average or ideal child and to imply a series of expectations of development against which an actual child can be measured and compared to other children. What is this, she asks, but the traditional educational model?

Newman briefly describes a few examples of curriculum design that are more consistent with the changed educational model. "There are, in fact, relatively few examples of learning-focused formal curriculum documents to point to" (p 8). She suggests the curriculum policy documents need to "show" not "tell" about the curriculum they are attempting to implement. However, she concedes that "there are no genre formulas" for creating the kind of curriculum she prefers. "At present, everyone attempting to articulate a transactional view of learning is forced to blaze new trails" (p 11).

Rethinking Teachers' Roles

The reviewers agree that learner-focused education as exemplified in the Primary Program depends crucially on a rethinking of teachers' roles. They point out that in a variety of ways the Primary Program will dramatically affect what teachers do. For example:

- "[The Primary Program] emphasizes the teacher's role as one which is ... proactive as well as purely reactive ... The emphasis on 'challenge' is an important corrective to the view that prevailed amongst many primary teachers in the past, to the effect that they should not push children but wait until they displayed signs of 'readiness' for further learning" (Wells, p 6).
- "My personal fear is that unprepared teachers will be thrust into non-graded primary structures without real attention given to the need for a fundamental philosophical change in their approach to teaching and learning" (Bredekamp, p 4).
- "The teacher's role becomes a facilitative one - a 'leading from behind' ... picking up on learning opportunities initiated by the learners. The teacher's role is also one of 'joint experimentation' ... In other words 'the teacher is a guide'" (Newman, p 5).
- "Not all teachers feel ... at ease enough to engage in some of these activities ... I wonder whether all teachers should be expected to model [all] subjects or whether it would be better to have those teachers who are very good at [particular] subjects serve as general teachers for all children in the school. It would be nice if everybody could do everything, but we can't" (Elkind, p 7).
- "To give effect to the vision that is presented in the Primary Program Foundation Document will require a commitment to

> lifelong learning on the part of teachers, as well as on the part of children" (Wells, p 11).

Such comments are reminders that the shift to learner-focused education can in practice only be accomplished by the teacher, or rather, by educators working together with the support and environment needed for effective learning.

Teachers as learners

Within learner-focused education, everyone learns, or should be encouraged and have every opportunity to do so. The description earlier in this report of how learning occurs applies not merely to children in school but equally - in a different scale and context - to their teachers. The statements that learning implies a subordination of information to a context of meaning, that it requires active involvement rather than passive receptivity, that it is many-sided and spontaneous rather than a step-by-step plod, that it is both interactively social in setting and yet highly individual in style all describe the qualities of a rich learning environment. Such an environment for children is no less desirable for teachers themselves. Thus what happens among the students in a Primary Program classroom should also be happening behind the scenes among Primary Program teachers within schools, across districts, and throughout the province.

For this reason Wells (p 11) recommends that the *Foundation Document* or its successors should incorporate a section on teachers as learners. He advocates regular meetings of in-school planning committees, perhaps anchored by teacher-librarians as resource people. Wells also supports the "teachers as researchers" concept in which teacher groups organize their own research programs.

Helping teachers prepare themselves

The reviewers indicate the importance of helping teachers adjust to a learner-focused environment in the short term while the Primary Program is being introduced. Elkind emphasizes the challenges of the Primary Program's more comprehensive notions of assessment and evaluation: "interpretation of expressive materials and classroom observation are learned skills" (p 7); and teachers also must learn "to be sensitive to the

> ***It took me a number of years as a clinician to be able to interpret children's drawings and other works ... Observation is a skill that has to be learned and is not something that all teachers can do without training.***
>
> **- Elkind, p 6**

personal issues that often intrude upon [children's activities] and to move [children] away from those issues without dismissing or minimizing them" (p 8). Bredekamp observes from American examples of eliminating organization by grades that when teachers are not prepared for and aware of their changed role "the structure is all that changes and children are still grouped homogeneously ... [so that] three groups become the first, second, and third grade" (p 5). To ensure that change is real and not just structural, she says, teacher understanding and support are essential.

CONGRUENCE

The question of Congruence addresses the degree of consistency and mutual support between the design of the Primary Program as set out in the *Foundation Document* and the overview presented in *Year 2000: A Framework for Learning*. This question is important in co-ordinating the development of learner-focused education in British Columbia.

The two reviewers of Congruence, in their analyses and conclusions, reveal interesting similarities and differences. For both reviewers the key to Congruence is supplied by the principles of learning, curriculum, and assessment presented in the *Year 2000 Framework*:

- Principles of learning:
  - Learning requires the active participation of the learner.
  - People learn in a variety of ways and at different rates.
  - Learning is both an individual and a social process.
- Principles of curriculum and assessment:
  - Curriculum and assessment should be learner-focused.
  - Assessment and reporting should help students make informed choices.

The Primary Program is very comprehensive and ambitious with many thoughtful insights into the nature of the developing child and the goals of education.

- Manley-Casimir, p 12

Both reviewers then consider how these principles appear in the *Foundation Document*. Wells traces and explains the links carefully in detail; Manley-Casimir more generally affirms that these principles "form the foundation of the ... Primary Program" (p 5).

Both reviewers go on to point out that Congruence extends further, in particular to the concepts of curriculum integration and to the expanded goals (Wells, pp 4, 6; Manley-Casimir, pp 12-13). Other areas of Congruence they note are the Learning Dimensions of Attitudes, Skills, and Knowledge (Wells, p 4) and the Primary Program's Guiding Principles (Manley-Casimir, pp 11-12). Not surprisingly, both reviewers find that the *Foundation*

and the *Year 2000 Framework* are, on the whole, indeed congruent. One reviewer concludes: "I find [the two documents] generally congruent with respect to the foundational principles of learning" (Manley-Casimir, p 19). The other reviewer states: "this is not simply a matter of formal congruence. In my opinion, the spirit which informs the Ministry's policy statement is fully captured in the ... *Foundation Document*" (Wells, p 5).

Apart from their comments on Congruence, these two reviewers say a great deal more about the issue of Philosophy. Their comments have been taken into account in the earlier sections on that issue. Though deep differences between them emerge, nevertheless they urge certain common themes. Both see a need for additional work to be done by the Primary Program in two main areas: the curriculum (Wells, pp 10-11; Manley-Casimir, pp 13-18) and the changed role of teachers (Wells, pp 11-12; Manley-Casimir, pp 5, 18-19). These calls correspond to those of the Philosophy reviewers.

USABILITY

The reviewer of Usability is a specialist in language and, as he states, an advocate of the "Plain Language" movement, which urges the elimination of needless jargon and complexity from report language. Coe examined the two documents as forms of general communication rather than as representatives of discourse within the educational idiom.

His brief conclusion is that "in some ways these documents are well designed, written, and presented; but they could have been more effective" (Coe, p 1). His review expands and supports this judgment with specific suggestions and recommendations, many of which will be useful when the documents are updated.

However, Coe prefaces his review with two qualifications. First, aspects of design and presentation which might be cited as weaknesses on general grounds may not in fact pose difficulties to the intended audience. Second, Coe observes that "to evaluate the usefulness of a document's design and presentation, one must know how it is being used" (p 2). In other words, the people whose opinions are indispensable to any judgment about the practicality and usability of the documents are those who use them. In the case of the Primary Program documents, the users are mainly the teachers themselves.

Coe's remarks suggest that an adequate judgment of Usability requires wider consultation with actual users of the Foundation and Resource documents. Future reviews include a re-examination of the Usability issue from the user's perspective.

It would be an inestimable loss if the vision inherent in the Document could not be realized.

- Cambourne, p 14

SUMMARY

What This Report Does

This report reviews the design of the Primary Program, which is being implemented in British Columbia schools beginning in 1991/92. This is the first in a series of reviews dedicated to particular issues of design, implementation, effects, and perception. These specialized reviews will lead to a comprehensive review of all aspects of the Primary Program at mid-decade. The review process as a whole is described in the Ministry's publication *Framework for Primary Program Review.*

As explained in that publication, this first review focuses on three design issues:

- To what extent is the Program congruent with the *Year 2000: A Framework for Learning*?
- To what extent do the Program philosophy, rationale, goals, and position statements reflect and represent current knowledge about the education of young children?
- To what extent are the Foundation and Resource documents practical and usable for B.C. educators?

The review has explored these design issues in two stages. First, outside opinions were obtained from seven impartial observers with credibility in the field of education. Each reviewer was sent the pertinent founding documents and asked to respond to one of the above questions. (The reviews they produced are available from the Ministry on request.)

The second stage was a critical examination of the seven outside reviews by the Primary Program Review Consulting Group, whose mandate is to advise the Ministry on technical matters related to review and reporting. For this report , the Consulting Group analysed, compared, and synthesized the comments of the seven outside reviewers on the three design issues.

What the Report Concludes

The report's findings and conclusions on the three design issues can be summarized as follows:

- ***To what extent is the Program congruent with the* Year 2000: A Framework for Learning?** The Program and the Framework are congruent both formally and in spirit.
- ***To what extent do the Program philosophy, rationale, goals, and position statements reflect and represent current knowledge about the education of young children?*** The Program is very successful in these respects. The Program's commitment to promoting the natural and intuitive learning capabilities of children, its principles and methods of assessment and evaluation, and its support for flexible school and classroom organization are especially effective in reflecting and representing current educational knowledge. The evolution of current educational knowledge suggests likely areas for future improvement of the Program. These areas include more sensitive addressing of the individual differences and needs of children, curriculum formulations more appropriate for learner-focused methods, and collaboration among all partners to assist educators in developing new roles as learners, facilitators, and researchers.
- ***To what extent are the Foundation and Resource documents practical and usable for B.C. educators?*** Initial indications are positive. A more comprehensive answer will be available when the educators themselves are consulted.

ABOUT THE REVIEWERS

Sue Bredekamp is Director of Professional Development of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). She is responsible for co-ordinating the improvement of professional practice in programs serving children from birth through age eight. Her major contributions to the work of NAEYC have been developing and directing a national, voluntary accreditation system for early childhood centres and schools, and developing NAEYC's position statements on *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs, Serving Children Birth through Age 8*. This document, along with *Accreditation Criteria and Procedures* and *Guide to Accreditation*, which Dr. Bredekamp researched and wrote, have been highly influential in defining best practices for the field. Dr. Bredekamp also researched and wrote NAEYC's position statements on standardized testing and appropriate curriculum and assessment, and NAEYC's teacher education guidelines for associate, baccalaureate, and advanced degrees. Dr. Bredekamp holds a Ph.D. in Early Childhood Education from the University of Maryland. Her professional experience includes teaching and directing early childhood programs, training child care personnel at a community college, and serving on the faculty of the Human Development/Childhood Education program at Mount Vernon College in Washington, D.C. She also served an internship in the Head Start Bureau at the Administration for Children, Youth, and Families.

Brian Cambourne is currently the Head of the Centre for Studies in Literacy at the University of Wollongong, in New South Wales, Australia. He taught for fifteen years in the New South Wales school system. He has been a lecturer in education at Wagga Wagga Teachers College (N.S.W.). Dr. Cambourne received a Fulbright Scholarship (1975-76) and a Harvard

Post-Doctoral Fellowship. He has studied at Harvard, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the University of Illinois, and the Language and Learning Center, University of Arizona. For the past decade, he has been engaged in classroom-based research on how children learn language and how they learn to read and write. His research uses a teacher-as-co-researcher model and has focused on developing a grounded theory of classroom learning and teaching in the language arts. The teacher-as-co-researcher model aims to give teachers a grounding in holistic (i.e., whole language) theory and practice. Dr. Cambourne's publications include: *The Whole Story* (Ashton Scholastic, 1988); *Read and Retell* (Methuen, 1987); and *Coping With Chaos* (Heinemann, 1986).

Richard M. Coe has taught rhetoric and writing, American studies, drama, humanities, literature, and literacy criticism in Canada, China, and the United States. Dr. Coe, who has chaired the Canadian Council of Teachers of English Commission on Public Doublespeak, is a Director of The Plain Language Institute in British Columbia, and also serves as a contributor in Canada for a foreign news weekly. He is an associate professor of English at Simon Fraser University, where he won an award for teaching excellence in 1984. He has worked with teachers developing composition curricula and pedagogues for the schools and has led workshops for various kinds of people, including union shop stewards, concerned with improving their writing and/or their supervision of writers. He has published numerous articles on rhetoric, literacy, composition theory and pedagogy, drama, popular culture, and literary criticism, including the prize-winning essay, "Rhetoric 2001." His *Toward a Grammar of Passages* (Southern Illinois University Press, 1988) introduces an instrument for studying and teaching generic structures by looking at the patterns of relationship among levels of generality within particular discourses. Prentice-Hall published a thoroughly revised edition of his innovative textbook, *Form and Substance* (New York and Toronto: Wiley, 1981) in 1990 under the new title, *Process, Form, and Substance: A Rhetoric for Advanced Writers*.

David Elkind is currently Professor of Child Study at Tufts University in Medford, Massachusetts. His list of publications is well over four hundred items and includes research, theoretical articles, book chapters, and thirteen books. Some of Dr. Elkind's articles include: "Miseducation: Young Children at Risk," in *Pediatrics*; "Overwhelmed by Kindergarten," in the *Boston Globe Magazine*; and "Developmentally Appropriate Practice: Philosophical and Practical Implications," in *Phi Delta Kappan*. Dr. Elkind may be best known for three recent books, *The Hurried Child, All Grown Up and No Place to Go*, and *Miseducation*. In 1964-65 he was a National Science Foundation Senior Postdoctoral Fellow at Piaget's Institut d'Epistemologie Genetique in Geneva. His research has been in the areas of perceptual, cognitive, and social development where he has attempted to build upon the research and theory of Jean Piaget. Dr. Elkind is currently a consultant to state education departments, clinics and mental health centres, as well as to government agencies and private foundations. He is a past President of the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Michael E. Manley-Casimir is a professor and the Director of Graduate Programs at the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University. His primary interest lies in the intersection of law and educational policy, and he has published many articles in this area. In conjunction with Ms. Wanda Cassidy, he has developed the program in law-related education at Simon Fraser University. Dr. Manley-Casimir is editor of several collections examining different issues in the socio-political context of education; these include: *The Development of Moral Reasoning* with Donald B. Cochrane (Praeger, 1981), *Family Choice in Schooling* (Lexington Books, 1981), *Education Canada: Federal Provincial Relations* with George Ivany (Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1981), *Children and Television: A Challenge for Education?* with Carmen Luke (Praeger, 1986). He is co-editor with Terri Sussel of *Courts in the Classroom: Education and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (Detselig, 1986).

Judith M. Newman, a writer and education consultant, is Professor of Education at Mount Saint Vincent University in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Dr. Newman teaches and writes about writing and reading and about critical professional inquiry. Her current research includes exploring ways of helping teachers become more reflective and to assume responsibility for their own teaching. Dr. Newman is author of *Craft of Children's Writing* (Scholastic; co-published Heinemann, 1984), *Whole Language: Theory in Use* (Heinemann, 1985), *Finding Our Own Way: Teachers Examining Their Assumptions* (Heinemann, 1990) and *Interwoven Conversations: Learning and Teaching Through Critical Reflection* (Ontario Institute for Studies in Education Press; co-published Heinemann, 1991). She is co-editor with Susan M. Church of *Issues in Literacy Learning: Cases for Discussion* (Ottawa: Canadian Council of Teachers of English, 1991).

Gordon Wells is Professor of Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. As a member of the Curriculum Department and of the Joint Centre for Teacher Development, he researches and teaches in the fields of language, literacy, and learning. His interest in action research as a mode of professional development for teachers has resulted in his involvement as consultant to the Peel Board of Education's project, *Talk: a Medium for Learning and Change,* and in his current work on *Learning through Talk: the role of language in the learning and teaching of science.* Dr. Wells has led a four-year longitudinal project, carried out by the Toronto Board of Education, on language and learning in schools serving multicultural communities. Before immigrating to Canada in 1984, he was Reader in Education at the University of Bristol and Director of the Bristol Study of 'Language at Home and at School,' in which a representative sample of children was recorded and observed from the age of 15 months until the end of the elementary stage of education. Several publications emerged from this project concerning children's first language development, their acquisition of literacy, and the role of language in their progress at school. Of these, the best known are *The Meaning Makers* (Heinemann, 1986) and *Language Development in the Pre-School Years* (Cambridge University Press, 1985). Dr. Wells has lectured and acted as consultant in Europe, both North and South America, Asia, and Australia.